

SLAVERY AND ITS TENDENCIES.

A LETTER

FROM

GENERAL J. WATSON WEBB

TO THE

New York Courier and Enquirer.

WASHINGTON, May 24, 1856.

More than forty-eight hours have elapsed, since a member of the House of Representatives, committed an assault upon a member of the Senate of the United States, when in his seat in the Senate Chamber, and in the discharge of duties legitimately appertaining to his official position, which has no parallel in the history of our country. I would not permit myself to write on this subject, while participating in the excitement which it was so well calculated to produce, even here, where freedom of speech, both in and out of the Capitol, is only indulged in by the few, and even by them, under the full conviction, that such indulgence is at the peril of limb, if not at the hazard of life. But the lapse of two days, and a careful consideration of the causes which have led to the existing state of affairs, have given me all of coolness, deliberation, and discretion, which I shall ever exercise when discussing this subject; and I shall therefore, proceed to discharge what I consider a duty—the neglect of which would be a crime, so long as I retain my connection with the Press of the United States, of which I have become, with some half dozen exceptions, the senior member.

First, then, let me repeat Mr. SUMNER's version of this assault, as given to me by himself, very shortly after his head had been partially shaved, and two wounds, respectively three and four inches long, and literally tearing the scalp from the bone, had been sewed up. He says: "At the moment of adjournment, I was busily occupied in franking documents for my constituents, preparatory to the closing of the mail; and to several gentlemen who approached with a view to conversation, I pleaded the necessity of my accomplishing a large amount of work in the next half hour, as my apology for continuing my labors. Having got rid of nearly a dozen persons by pleading this excuse, about twenty minutes after the ad-

journment, Mr. BROOKS, of the House of Representatives, presented himself directly in front of my desk, and attracted my attention by the remark, 'Mr. SUMNER, I have read your speech.' I looked up, and became conscious it was Mr. Brooks, whom I knew by sight, and exclaimed, 'Ah!' when he added, 'Yes, I have read it twice carefully; and a more infamous libel never'— At this moment, his blow descended upon my head, and I have no knowledge of anything that took place, until I found myself on the floor of the Senate Chamber, near the Clerk's table, supported by some friends."

Those who witnessed the assault, say that upon receiving the blows, given in quick succession and with terrible force, Mr. SUMNER attempted to rise from his seat, to which he was in a measure pinioned, by his legs being under his desk—the legs of which, like all the desks of the Senate Chamber, have plates of iron fastened to them, and these plates are firmly secured to the floor. His first attempt to rise, was a failure, and he fell back into his chair, and the blows of his assailant continued to fall mercilessly upon his uncovered head. His second attempt ripped up the iron fastenings of his desk, and he precipitated himself forward—but, being blinded and stunned, wide of the direction in which Mr. BROOKS stood. Prostrated on the floor, and covered with blood as I never saw man covered before, the assault continued, until Mr. MURRAY and Mr. MORGAN, both members of the House of Representatives from New York, had time to come from the extreme southeast angle of the Senate Chamber; and who, forcing their way through the crowd of Senators! and others, in the midst of whom Mr. SUMNER was lying senseless and being beaten, they seized the assailant, and rescued the body of SUMNER. Of course, I do not speak from personal knowledge; but Mr. MURRAY informs me, that not only did the blows

continue until he had reached the scene of action, and forced his way through the crowd, but when he first threw his arms around Mr. Brooks, he failed to secure his right arm, and at least one blow was inflicted upon the prostrate form of the insensible Senator, after he, Mr. MURRAY, had laid hands upon his assailant.

These are the simple facts of the case, as they will undoubtedly be sworn to, by both Mr. SUMNER and Messrs. MURRAY and MORGAN; and I give them precisely as they are related to me by those gentlemen, and without the slightest desire to aggravate what I consider the most inexcusable outrage upon the institutions of the country of which I have ever become cognizant.

In looking at this grave attack upon the constitutional rights of a Senator—this violation of the privileges of the Senate, and this most unpardonable outrage upon the sanctity of the Senate Chamber—both Mr. SUMNER and Mr. Brooks, so far as they are individually concerned, sink into absolute insignificance. Had they met and fought, and both been killed on Pennsylvania avenue, together with a dozen friends of each, it would have been a melancholy event; but in my estimation, based upon cool and deliberate reflection, such an event, sad as it would have been to record it, would not and should not have caused a tythe of the feeling of indignation and horror, which will be felt by every right-minded man in the nation, when he hears of this terrible outrage upon our institutions, and the freedom of debate and liberty of speech, and gross violation of the sanctity of the Senate Chamber; and learns in addition, that it was calmly witnessed and approved by certain Democratic Senators, and indirectly sustained, approved, and justified, by every friend of the present Administration in the House of Representatives, and, with two honorable exceptions, by every member of that body from the slaveholding States; one and all of whom, voted to screen their colleague from the punishment justly due to his conduct;—a vote worthy of men who deliberately violated their solemnly plighted faith by the repeal of the Compromise of 1820, and whose only idea of constitutional rights, constitutional obligations, and constitutional requirements, appears to be regulated by the one only consideration, of what is required by the Slave Power to insure its extension over free territory, in order thereby, to perpetuate forever the Government of the United States in the hands of the Slaveocracy which now controls and directs it.

It is not the assault upon Mr. SUMNER, *per se*, which I feel called upon to deplore and to hold up to the calm and indignant condemnation of the people of the United States; but because by this assault upon a Senator of the United States, in his seat in the Senate Chamber, and when in the discharge of his legitimate duties, the Constitution has been trampled under foot, the sanctity of the Senate has been violated,

freedom of debate has been attempted to be suppressed by brute force, and Liberty itself—constitutional liberty and freedom of thought and action—has been ruthlessly assailed, and the assault been justified and applauded by grave Senators, and by every Representative of the people save two, HUMPHREY MARSHALL of Kentucky, and HENRY W. HOFFMAN of Maryland, living in the slave States, and by every Representative of the people, who speaks the sentiments or sustains the measures of the existing Administration of the country.

After nearly thirty years of editorial labor, always speaking my sentiments frankly and fully, it is unnecessary to remind the daily reader of the *Courier and Enquirer*, that no man in the United States, has ever been willing to go farther in sustaining the constitutional rights of the South in regard to their peculiar local institution, than I have. I have repeatedly published and proclaimed, that I do not look upon Slavery as a curse to the slave; but, on the contrary, in the aggregate, a great blessing, and so, I think, designed to be by God; but I have ever held and published, and every day of my life I am more confirmed in the conviction, that Slavery is a curse to the country where it exists, and utterly demoralizing to the people who tolerate it. It is, however, a purely local institution, with nothing *national* in its character; and the reckless slaveholder who seeks to extend this curse through the legislation of the General Government, and the equally reckless Abolitionist who would have the General Government, directly or indirectly, interfere with this purely local institution, whose blighting influence I deprecate, are alike disturbers of the public peace, and enemies to the Constitution of our country.

That Slavery is a curse to the country in which it is permitted to have a foothold, except in those Southern regions where white labor is impossible, is sufficiently demonstrated by the present condition and future prospects of the more Northern slaveholding States; that it is demoralizing in its influence upon the people among whom it exists, is rendered equally apparent by the habits and customs, the violence and habitual disregard of life, and the whole tone of thought and action, among the people who are born and educated amidst its influences. That it is an Aristocratic and Anti-Republican Institution, is proclaimed by the very terms of "Master" and "Slave," by which alone it can be described; and, like all other aristocratic institutions, it produces specimens of the highest refinement, the gentlest habits, and the greatest culture, only to render more conspicuous the general brutality and debasing recklessness which it imposes upon the great mass of the people. The Southern Gentleman and the Southern Lady, are therefore, noble specimens of humanity, well calculated to grace and adorn every society in which they may be cast; and nobody estimates more highly, or appreciates

more thoroughly, this small class, than I do. But I cannot shut my eyes to the fact, that the superiority of the few to whom I allude, is purchased at the expense of the many; and the truth of this observation, will be conceded by every candid person, who will ask himself the question, where—in what section of our country—whether in the slave or free States—occur the most street fights, homicides, brawls, and acts of violence? I am safe in saying, that during the past five years, the deaths or injuries in the slave-States, from these causes, would average at least two a week; while in the free States, during the same period, they would not average two per annum; and, even in those cases, the probability is, that the actors in them, would prove to be inhabitants of the slave States.

I make this remark more in sorrow than in any spirit of boasting, for the double purpose of proving to my countrymen the true cause of the demoralization which exists in this, the Capital of the Nation, and to rouse them to a sense of their duty to themselves and their posterity, in resisting, as one man, the extension of this blighting curse into the now free Territory and over the virgin soil of Kansas. And if any other illustration of the truth of my position be required than that to which I have referred, let me instance the occurrences of the kind alluded to, within the last five months, which have happened here in the Capital of the Nation, and in which members of the House of Representatives have been the principal actors. I confine the record to them alone.

First, then, WILLIAM SMITH, an ex-Governor of the State of Virginia, and member of the House of Representatives, assailed and beat the Editor of the *Evening Star*, in December last, in the lobby of the House.*

Second, ALBERT RUST, a member of the House of Representatives, from Arkansas, assailed and beat the Editor of the *New York Tribune*, in the grounds of the Capitol, immediately after leaving the House of Representatives.

Third, PHILEMON T. HERBERT of Alabama, a member of Congress from California, shot down and killed an Irish waiter at WILLARD'S, and is now under bonds to appear before the Grand Jury, and await his trial for such crime as they may adjudge him to have committed.

Fourth, PRESTON S. BROOKS, a member of the House of Representatives, from South Carolina, assails and beats unmercifully, a Senator from Massachusetts, when occupying his seat in the Senate of the United States, and engaged in the transaction of business legitimately appertaining to his station.

Here, then, you have, in five months, four flagrant breaches of the peace on the part of members of Congress who were born and bred in slave States, and who are necessarily, demoralized by that institution; while during the same

period, not a solitary instance has occurred of members from the free States forgetting what is due by public Legislators to law and order, to civilization, and to the decencies and courtesies of the society in which they live.

You must next look to the manner in which these flagrant breaches of the peace, by those whose duty it was, above all others, to respect the laws, have been treated by the House of which the offenders are members. The first and second outrages—whipping Editors who failed to protect their persons from pollution, by promptly resisting force by greater and more decisive force—were considered such trivial offences, that the subject was not even referred to in the House which was outraged by such conduct on the part of its members. The third offence—the shooting down and killing an Irish waiter at Willard's Hotel—was gravely considered by the House of Representatives, and voted to be an occurrence not meriting investigation even; and every Representative from a slave State, and every supporter of this Administration save one, united in suppressing inquiry; and the offender daily takes his seat in Congress, and legislates and aids in the passage of Laws for the government of the country, while he himself, is about to be tried for the gravest crime which man can perpetrate against his fellow-man.

The last offender, Mr. BROOKS, of South Carolina, will at least have his conduct inquired into; but it must not be lost sight of, that such inquiry by the House of which he is a member was strenuously resisted by every member of that body, save two, who represents the slave States, and by all who sustain the present Pro-Slavery Administration. Nobody who knows the parties, and has a proper respect for what he writes, would be willing to charge that the Southern members of Congress voted corruptly in thus striving to prevent an investigation into the aggravated assault upon a Senator of the United States, by one of their own body, and that, too, when the Senator assaulted, was in his seat in the Senate Chamber, and as much under the protection of the Senate as he would have been if that body had been in session. I say that no considerate person would presume to call this deliberate corruption on the part of the members of Congress from the slave States. What, then, was it? How is this extraordinary vote to be accounted for or explained? I answer, by the demoralizing tendencies of the Institution of Slavery, which not only compels its representative to vote as its instincts demand, regardless of the Constitution and the Laws, but which equally requires of the members from the free States who have loaned themselves to this Administration in doing the behests of the Slave Power, to disgrace and stultify themselves in the eyes of the whole American people. If there be on God's footstool one human being, more entitled than all others, to the contempt of honest men, it is the member of Congress

* This assault took place in the street, and not in the lobby of the House, as appears by a correction in the *Advertiser and Enquirer* of the 29th.

from a free State, who, entertaining the sentiments which all our Northern members do, and without a solitary one of the excuses for his vote which naturally cluster around those who are born and educated amid the influence and tendencies of the peculiar institution, yet, in miserable subserviency to this Administration, and the Pro-Slavery doctrines to which it is committed, dares not vindicate the Constitution of the country by punishing one who put at defiance its provisions most dear to freemen and most essential for the preservation of our liberties. I may mourn over the demoralization of Slavery, and the overbearing violence and disregard of law and civilization which it engenders in the masses, while it exalts and refines the favored few; but it rarely calls forth a feeling of contempt. Even its vices and its crimes, are in the main, manly ones; and whatever of contempt the late votes in the House of Representatives may have engendered, it belongs solely, to the unscrupulous members from the free States, who consented to do this dirty work of party, and who have been so aptly denominated "Doughfaces" by the very men who, having benefited by the treason, turn from the traitors with loathing and disgust.

To attempt to describe the actual state of affairs here, in the Capital of the Nation, would be a hopeless task. It would not be believed, were one from Heaven to proclaim it trumpet-tongued through the land; and yet no one can live here, as I have for the last six months, without feeling his blood boil at witnessing the fears and apprehensions of fatal consequences, on the part of our Northern men, if any one ventures openly and manfully to speak the truth in the bar-rooms, on the corners of the streets, and on the floor of Congress. And there is reason for these fears. This is a city in a slave District; its tone is the tone and sentiment of Slavery; its visitors are mostly from the slave States, and a large majority of them (not the better portion,) carry pistols and bowie-knives; and what is more, they have, both here and elsewhere, proved that they will not hesitate, on occasion, freely to use them. They are overbearing, threatening, and defiant in their manner; and our people have been overawed and cowed. SUMNER, a man of peace, ventured to hear them, and we perceive his fate. WILSON put them at defiance; but at the same time he put pistols in his pocket, and publicly declared that he held his person sacred from assault! GREELEY carried a revolver during the latter part of his sojourn here; and then, and then only, even he, professedly a non-combatant, was no longer molested; and since the brutal assault on Mr. SUMNER, two-thirds of the Anti-Nebraska members of Congress, and all who claim and exercise the right of free speech as distinct from abusive language, or a bullying, threatening manner, have arrived at the conclusion, that the time has come when it is a duty they owe

alike to themselves and to the country, to assert, and, if necessary, to vindicate, this great constitutional privilege, and to be in a situation, at all times, effectually to protect themselves from the Bully and the Assassin.

This is not a flattering picture to go abroad; but it is true, and recent events prove it. No reasonable man should doubt, that the Slave Power have unalterably determined to extend the area of their now merely *local* institution; and, if possible, to render it *national*. The bowie-knife, the pistol, and the bludgeon, are all elements to be used in effecting this result; the latter, practically, and on the most trivial occasion—the two former, only theoretically, and except under extraordinary circumstances. They are designed to operate upon the *fears* of the free States; and our people may as well be told at once, that when they visit this city, they should come determined, at all proper times and in all proper places, openly and manfully, but quietly and in gentlemanly and courteous language, to speak their honest convictions of the heinous crime perpetrated by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise; of the iniquitous *project* of forcing Slavery into Kansas; of their regard for the Constitution and the constitutional rights of every section of the country; of the wickedness of Slavery Extension; of its being a merely local institution, with which the General Government may not, and shall not, meddle; of the right of every slave State to be protected in the enjoyment of this and every other merely local institution they may establish, not incompatible with the Constitution; and of our unalterable determination, to stand by that great charter of our Liberties, and the liberty of speech which it guarantees, and never to yield to Southern fanatics or Northern demagogues, one foot of territory north of 36° 30' to the blighting curse of Slavery.

It is the right of Freemen boldly to express these sentiments here, as well as elsewhere; and I tell them, in all sincerity, that the time has arrived when they must do so, courteously but fearlessly, on all proper occasions and in all proper places, or we shall all, and speedily too, become as completely the slaves of the Slave Power, as are their plantation *chattels*; or, what is far more degrading, we shall become the same pliant, cringing, and sycophantic instruments of the Slaveocracy, as are the Northern doughfaces, who are made by the present Administration, to discourse just such music as their Southern masters may be pleased to dictate for the time being.

It must not be forgotten, that I am writing against the Institution of Slavery, and its demoralizing and debasing tendencies; and not against the many honest, honorable, intelligent, and high-minded gentlemen and pure Christians, who, being the aristocracy of the institution, are the inheritors of all the good it dispenses, and the recipients of its profits, while its baneful influences are the legitimate inheritance

of the masses among whom it exists, producing everywhere the same fruits of violence, bloodshed, and a disregard of law and order, and the peaceful habits and practices of civilization. Aside from the favored few, in the slave States, nineteen-twentieths of their population, carry arms—bowie-knives, pistols, and sword-canes! And against whom are they thus armed? Against a common enemy or against their slaves? By no means; but *against each other*. And this solitary fact, and the consequences which naturally flow from it, is conclusive as regards the demoralizing tendencies of an institution, which the present Administraton, acting under the dictation of the Slave Power, and aided by unscrupulous politicians of the North, are endeavoring to force upon the free people and free soil of Kansas. To this end, the entire influence and patronage of the Government—it's civil, military, and moral power—are all directed; and alongside of these, prominent and threatening, stands the *Bullying* of the Slaveocracy, boastingly pointing to the bowie-knife, the pistol, and the bludgeon, and impudently taunting the entire North with cowardice! I cannot blame them for their love of power and their desire to extend it; I do not quarrel with their ruder civilization, the natural offspring of their peculiar institution; and I do not wonder at their believing, that the doughfaces of the North, who so weekly do their behests, are but a type of our whole people, and that we can be bullied, whiped, and "*kicked*," into any course or policy which they may please to dictate to us. But I do wonder that intelligent men among them, presume to talk of their devotion to the Constitution, when, with a unanimity unexampled in the history of the North, their united representation in Congress, justify by their votes, an open disregard of that plainest and all-important provision of the Constitution, which was intended to secure to members of both Houses of Congress, entire immunity for words spoken in debate.

Will the North—the free and educated, and civilized, and peace-loving North—tamely submit to the impudence and the bullying of the Slave Power? This is the question which I desire to put directly to every law-abiding and Union-loving freeman of the North. I would be the first to punish those who wish to withhold from our Southern brethren, one jot or tittle of the protection to which the institution of Slavery is constitutionally entitled in the localities where it exists; but I would have the entire North awaken to the attempt of the Slave Power, to extend the institution into free territory; and to the means resorted to, to accomplish that nefarious purpose. I would have them feel that the time for action has arrived; and that not only must that action be prompt and efficient, if we would protect ourselves from the encroachments of Slavery, but that, if we tamely submit to the blustering and bullying habitually resorted to here, in the Capital of the Nation, we

shall very soon be taught, that liberty of speech is a boon which we hold, subject to the caprices of the Slave Power; and to indulge in it equally with themselves, may at any time be visited by the discretionary application of the pistol and the bludgeon.

Of the purposes of the Slave Power and its Northern allies in the coming Presidential election, there is no longer any doubt. It is openly proclaimed by the Democratic press, from Maine to Texas; and only this day, the Government organ, published in this city, boldly declares, that "*whatever other question may enter into the coming contest, THE SLAVERY ISSUE, as included in the Kansas measure, must and will take precedence. In comparison with IT, all other questions are of minor importance.*" And in allusion to Mr BUCHANAN'S past Federalism, and the suspicion only, that it may cause him to prefer his country and the rights of Freedom, to mere party, it adds—"they want no man whose record is not thoroughly Democratic." These declarations are significant; and richly will the people of the free North have merited the outrages and contumely which are daily heaped upon them by men immeasurably their inferiors in all that constitutes manhood and civilization, if they hesitate to vindicate their right to freedom of speech, or falter in their determination to drive back into the fens and marshes, where it properly belongs, the institution which WASHINGTON, and JEFFERSON, and MADISON, alike condemned, but of which, PIERCE and DOUGLAS and the Doughfaces of the North, acting under the lash of the Slave Power, have become the willing propagandists.

In my comments upon the recent outrage in the Senate, I have intentionally kept out of view both Mr. SUMNER and Mr. BROOKS—looking at it solely as an insult to the Country, a trampling upon the Constitution, and an outrage upon the sanctity of the Senate Chamber, which merited death on the spot from any Patriot present who was in a position to inflict the punishment. Neither the character of the party assailed, nor that of his assailant, which was heretofore, without spot or blemish, nor the nature of the provocation, have any weight with me in writing this letter. The Constitution has been trampled upon, a Senator has been assailed in the Senate Chamber for words spoken in debate, the Country has been disgraced, and the Representatives of the Slave Power in the House of Representatives, have, with two honorable exceptions, justified the outrage:—and for these wrongs I invoke the spirit of Freedom at the North to demand redress. It is due to Mr. SUMNER, however, to say, as a fact familiar to all who are accustomed to read the Debates in the Senate, that in each and every of the last five sessions of Congress, Messrs. SEWARD, HALE, and SUMNER, have received, at the hands of Senators from the slave States and their pliant tools of the North, ten times—nay,

a hundred times the abuse which, in his late incomparable speech, he so scathingly hurled back upon his assailants. All this has heretofore been submitted to in silence; and, in my judgment, too long submitted to; and now, when forbearance ceases to be a virtue, and the member for Massachusetts, in vindication of his manhood and in the exercise of his privilege, retorts upon his assailants a tythe only, of the abuse they have so long and so unspareingly heaped upon him and his friends, he is told that his "audacity" is absolutely incomprehensible, and his purpose inconceivable! Alike astounded that the man of peace, and the meek, modest, and retiring scholar, should dare to repel any attack whatever; and, cowed and crushed by its scathing severity, Mr. DOUGLAS exclaims, under the smart of the wounds inflicted, "What does the Senator *mean* by this attack upon the majority of this body? What, I ask, does the Senator *mean*? What does he want us to *do*? We already refuse to know him socially. Does he want us to KICK him? I ask again, *Does he want us to KICK him?*" Mr. MASON, of Virginia, follows, in a similar vein; and Mr. BROOKS, of South Carolina, a member of the House of Representatives, resorts to the bludgeon, and assails him in his seat in the Senate Chamber of the United States.

I am not prepared to defend the language used by Mr. SUMNER, except that it was retaliatory. The wrong lies at the door of those who commenced the use of these personalities, under the miserable plea, that because the person thus violating the decorum of parliamentary rules was willing to back his language by the duel, he was justified in his assaults, while his adversary, if not thus willing to follow up his retort, is bound to submit in silence. Such, I say, is the plea of the Slave Power in defence of their attacks, and in condemnation of SUMNER's resorting to the same weapon of defence. They proclaim everywhere, that their attacks upon the non-combatants of the North are justifiable, because those making them *are willing to fight*; and that unless the assailed Senator will adopt the law of the Slave Power, thus

manufactured for him, he must submit in silence, or be beaten to death with bludgeons, even in the Senate Chamber of the nation!

Have we no remedy for this? Are there not among us, can there not be found in the great North, men of qualifications for both the Senate and the House of Representatives, who possess also the necessary moral daring and physical courage, to meet and put down this disgusting bullying, either with pistol or with bludgeon, as circumstances may require? If there be such, let them be sent here as your Representatives, until the South are taught, after their own fashion, that there not only is a North, but that it is unalterably determined to assert all its rights, and to maintain all its privileges, at the same time that it will, in good faith, at all times and in all places, promptly discharge all its duties to the Union, and hold sacred the rights of every section of country, (whether sectional, local, or national,) under that Constitution, to which the allegiance of all is equally due.

The time for submission has passed; and that for action, presses forcibly upon us. Our opponents have made, and present to us, the one great issue, of extension of Slavery into Territory now Free. It is our duty to meet it; and, that every Freeman in the land may understand this great issue, and, at the same time, know precisely why a Senator of Massachusetts has been beaten in the Senate Chamber of the Union, and almost killed, by this arrogant and overbearing Slave Power, let Mr. SUMNER's great and eloquent speech, be printed by hundreds of thousands and scattered broadcast through the entire North. Let it be read at our public meetings; let it be proclaimed from the house-tops, and from the corners of our streets; and, if needs be, let it be preached from our pulpits and explained in our lecture-rooms. Let the people be thus taught what this Slave Power is, and the character of the exposure which was deemed to have merited the bludgeon, and which, the supporters of the present Administration in the House of Representatives, unanimously sustain and justify.

J. W. W.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

BUELL & BLANCHARD, PRINTERS.

1856.